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THE RELATION OF FOLK-LORE TO ANTHROPOLOGY.¹BY PLINY EARLE[‡]GODDARD.

It is certain the time will come when the study of folk-lore as a scholastic pursuit will stand by itself. Modern conditions and tendencies are sure to bring about such a specialization. There exists already this organization and its journal devoted to folk-lore alone, at least as far as the name and written constitution are concerned. There is lacking, however, any considerable body of men who are devoting themselves solely to the study of folk-lore. When the men are ready, a critical method will develop which will make the study of primitive literature an end in itself, a serious and worthy pursuit.

For most of us at the present time the study of the folk-lore of the North American Indians is a minor consideration or a means to an end. The material which we publish is chiefly a by-product of other work. It receives serious consideration only when a thesis must be prepared for a degree, or a presidential address is due.

Accepting, then, the present situation, let us consider of what extent and of what value is the contribution of folk-lore to anthropology in North America. In the current use of the word in America, "anthropology" includes archæology, ethnology, linguistics, and physical anthropology. It is generally conceded that the latter two subjects can be successfully pursued only by specialists, who can devote the greater part of their time to the subjects in question. The opinion is growing that archæology and ethnology must be united, — first, because the study of mere implements, however well constructed and ornamented, can never be a science (they may be classified and described in technical language, but to give them scientific worth they must be definitely connected with human activity); second, ethnology has no historical perspective without the aid of archæology, which, through the stratification of implements, reveals a definite order of development. Rightly or wrongly, ethnology has come to mean in America a study of culture, and, in its more common use, the study of the cultures of unlettered peoples.

The proposition we are considering, then, is, What does folk-lore contribute to our knowledge of human culture?

Numerous efforts have been made in the past to make folk-lore solve the problems of anthropology. Man has been particularly curious about his past. Having found men in America widely dispersed and manifesting manifold differences in culture, the questions of when and whence have been uppermost. Lacking a written history, it was at

¹ Address of the retiring President, delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Folk-Lore Society, held in Philadelphia, December, 1914.

first hoped that the oral traditions of the Indians might furnish an account of the peopling of America. Until fifty years ago the accepted age of the world was six thousand years; and five hundred or a thousand years seemed an ample period for the settling of America and the development of the specialized cultures. It was a favorite belief with the missionaries, our first ethnologists, that whatever existed of religion was a dim and distorted remembrance of the original divine revelation, the perfect account of which is to be found in the Old Testament. Father Morice finds among the Carrier of British Columbia a story of the fall of man and an account of the biblical deluge. The story of the actual entering of America has not been discovered. From many tribes migration and origin myths have been recorded which have been generally interpreted as in part at least historical. The possibility of accounts of historical facts persisting for many years cannot be denied. Any great catastrophe, like an inundation, might easily make such an impression on a community that it would be recounted for a very long period of time. What we know does happen is, that such an historical incident attaches to itself a mass of purely mythical material. With out present knowledge and methods, it is impossible to separate with any certainty these historical elements from their mythological settings.

Perhaps the best example known of accurate oral tradition is in the transmission of the Rig Vedas. Here we are dealing with metrical compositions having exact form. Their transmission was the duty of a special class, highly trained and carefully drilled. In America there are some known cases of special attempts to perpetuate compositions. On the Northwest coast certain myths are family property, and descend in the family as does other property. It is common among many tribes for the rituals to be transmitted by specially-trained persons. "The Navajo Night Chant" is in the keeping of priests, whose number is maintained by initiations. It is probable that the entire ritual is transmitted with considerable fidelity. The material concerned, however, consists of songs and a narrative of undoubted mythical character.

North of Mexico the only efforts to retain historical happenings in proper sequence are those involving some pictorial records, such as the winter counts. These do not carry us farther back than a century, and the information connected with them is of little moment.

We are not to expect, then, that folk-lore in America will directly contribute much of historical importance to the solution of the problems of anthropology.

For the conjecturing of the history of primitive people, much has been expected of the comparative method. In language, the expectations have been in part realized. The fact that closely related languages of

the Siouan stock were spoken in the Northern Plains and on the South Atlantic coast of North America tells us that these now far-separated peoples were once in social contact. We know that the various Athapaskan-speaking peoples of the Southwest were connected somewhere and at some time with the Déné of the north. Particularly, we know that the Kiowa Apache were once a part of the southern group and closely associated with the Jicarilla Apache, since they share most of the linguistic peculiarities which distinguish the southern from the northern Athapaskan, and have an important phonetic shift common to Jicarilla Apache and Lipan.

Cultural comparisons furnish evidences, if not of an older grouping and of migrations, at least of the direction of cultural transmission.

Folk-lore has also been put to the test. If myths and folk-tales persist in tribes from generation to generation, may not the same recognizable myths be found among tribes now far separated, but once forming a single community? If such should be found among the Blackfoot and Micmac, their former connection, assumed through language, would be corroborated. It is indeed possible to find folk-tale incidents common to the Micmac and the Blackfoot; but these same incidents are also known not only to the intervening Algonkin-speaking peoples, as we might expect, but to many other tribes. Recently Professor Boas has demonstrated that some apparently indigenous tales of North America are found in Africa and the Philippines, whither they have been carried by the Spanish and Portuguese.

The rapidity and thoroughness with which folk-lore is transmitted make it nearly, if not quite, valueless as a means of reconstructing history. This applies to the better-known myths and tales. There may be esoteric myths connected with ceremonies, not so readily transmitted, which may supply good evidence of former grouping and contact. That a comparative study of songs will do so is equally likely. They seem to be readily borrowed, but usually borrowed with their words also, which betray their origin. The greatest lack in our comparative studies is that of music.

There is a third way in which folk-lore as a means may contribute to the study of human culture. Among unlettered peoples, folk-lore takes the place of literature. Like literature, it reflects the life of the people. There is no better example of light thrown upon the culture of a people by literature than that which the *Odyssey* throws upon the life of the early Greeks. What is more satisfactory for household routine than the description of the family at Ithaca? The women work at spinning and weaving; the men eat, drink, and engage in sports. Telemachus goes to his chamber lighted by his nurse. If you wish light on zoöculture, read how the Cyclops tended his flocks and cared for the milk. Are you interested in the social customs, you will find

them described in the reception tendered Odysseus by the Phæacians. The attitude of the Greeks toward their gods is revealed almost to perfection. In nearly every happening the gods have their share. They are the companions and counsellors of the men. With these intimate pictures of human life of an age long past, compare the archæological remains, the stone walls of Mycene, the golden cups, the inlaid swords and daggers, — perfect works of art, but very limited in what they can tell us of the people who made and used them.

So in North America there are in the published folk-lore detailed accounts of the manner of living and social customs for the Northwest coast, California, the Southwest, the Plains, and the Eastern Woodlands. Not only are the religious ceremonies described, but often these accounts of ceremonies are the patterns and the authority for the ceremonies themselves. It may be admitted that the myths are primarily founded on the ceremonies, and yet the myths may have great secondary influence on the ceremonies.

As a method of securing an unbiased account of the culture of a people, the recording of abundant folk-lore has much to be said in its favor. There are two other methods commonly employed. Sometimes the chief reliance is upon direct observation, — a method employed for the sun-dance by Dorsey, and for the ceremonies of the Hopi by Voth. Direct observation, if an attempt is made to describe the entire cycle of community life, requires too much time, and furnishes no means of discriminating between the accidental, and the essential or usual happenings. The method, being altogether objective, fails to give us an interpretation of the events observed. The more usual method, of securing a good informant and subjecting him to thorough questioning, produces abundant and fairly satisfactory results. It is open to the defect of suggestion and bias. The informant must of necessity adjust himself more or less to the attitude of mind of the questioner.

Folk-narratives, on the other hand, are not the product of one person under the particular conditions of some definite time and place. In their verbal transmission they have been moulded by many individuals, until they conform to the conceptions of the average people forming the community. From them we secure the Indian's own views of his activities and of nature. On the other hand, one must make allowances for those features introduced for the sake of art, such as round or ceremonial numbers, conventional forms of narrative, etc. He must expect that many things obvious to the Indian are omitted, and that certain phases of life are passed over in silence because of taboos or a too serious attitude toward them.

As a means of securing an unbiased view of primitive life from the native standpoint, the recording of folk-lore is amply justified. It

needs, to be sure, to be co-ordinated with direct observation and wise questioning.

But folk-lore is of itself an important part of the culture of a primitive community, and as such is an end, not merely a means, of anthropological research. It represents and expresses the Indian's philosophy of life and his beliefs about the natural and supernatural world.

The material side of culture is transmitted from generation to generation and from tribe to tribe by the unconscious imitation and more conscious acquiring of the habits involved in mechanical processes required in producing those articles necessary to man's life and happiness. In like manner the tastes in art and ideals of beauty pass by the mere observation of the forms and the colors of the decorations. The more subtle elements of life, — moral standards, rules of conduct, beliefs concerning the ultimate origins and ends of things, evaluations of men, animals, and supernatural beings — are transmitted by these fairly well formulated and persistent myths. They serve as a means of education in these particulars.

Into the composition of these folk-products has gone considerable of art. In a purely formal way, to be sure, art is noticeably lacking in North American folk-literature. Rhythm and rhyme do not appear outside of the songs; but in the nature and order of the events narrated we frequently find repetition, contrast, balance, and symmetry. Embodied in these stories there is frequently much of humor and pathos. Among the greater number of the tribes, story-telling during the long hours of winter darkness was a common social diversion.

As a phase of human culture, folk-lore, like material culture, ceremonies, and language, should be collected for its own worth and made available by publication. The accumulated material should be classified; and the geographical areas over which definite types, as well as specific tales and incidents, extend should be determined. Notwithstanding what has been said above, about the ease with which folk-tales are disseminated, it is true that areas can be determined within which very definite characteristics appear. Regardless of the distribution of a tale otherwheres, when found on the Northwest coast it will be so modified as to reflect the sea, rivers, mountains, and forest, and the native life peculiar to that region. It is also true that certain stories have not passed out of the region in which they would seem to have originated.

This comparative study of folk-lore, if the first to be undertaken, is probably the least in ultimate importance. The compositions should be subjected to analysis; the elements of art should be isolated, compared, and evaluated. The philosophy expressed needs sympathetic study and interpretation, that our knowledge may be enriched.

For this intensive work, specialists in folk-lore will be needed; and,

when a degree of interest has been aroused, they will appear. We shall then have the condition fulfilled to which attention was called at the beginning of this address as being still necessary to make folk-lore an independent scholastic pursuit,—a considerable body of specialists and a developed method.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY,
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